

CONFIDENTIAL
MANAGEMENT IN CONFIDENCE

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DSSP-Lt Cdr Carleton
DMS(N)-Chief Salvage Officer

Copy to:

DGSR/SUBS 11
AD Science (NUC) 1

DISPOSAL OF DECOMMISSIONED NUCLEAR SUBMARINES

1. At a meeting on 31 January to discuss this subject, the Secretary of State accepted a suggestion from CSA that we should investigate the feasibility of disposing of the UK's decommissioned nuclear submarines on the continental shelf inside the UK's territorial waters. Professor Oxenbury proposed that the submarines could be lowered to the seabed, and radioactivity levels monitored in the vicinity in order to allay fears about safety. The vessels could be disposed of in 200m of water which was well below the depth to which amateur divers could reach, but which might still enable them to be retrieved in case of need. The implication of CSA's suggestion was that disposing of the vessels inside the UK's territorial waters would obviate the international problems which we would face were we to dispose of these vessels in international waters.
2. The international legal instrument which governs the dumping of material at sea is the London Dumping Convention. This prohibits the disposal of high level radioactive waste but allows that of intermediate and low level waste. However, a non-binding moratorium on the disposal of all radioactive waste has been in operation since 1983, and although the UK voted against the moratorium, and has said publicly that we retain the right to dump radioactive material at sea, we have not in fact done so since 1982, and nor have any of the other contracting parties as far as we are aware.
3. When considering CSA's suggestion, the key factor is the definition of the "sea" in terms of the London Dumping Convention. Article III defines the "sea" as "all marine waters other than the internal waters of States." In other words, the Convention applies equally to the territorial sea, and if we were to pursue CSA's idea, we should have to dump the vessels in the UK's internal waters which considerably reduces the area of water where this would be possible.
4. I should be most grateful if DSSP would urgently consider whether there are any potential dump sites within the UK's internal waters with sufficient space to dispose of four SSBNs and 18 SSNs, and which meet the following criteria:-

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